

Catawba County Going Green with EcoComplex

By Gina Lindsey

Catawba County is going green, with green energy that is. Together the county is working with two companies to develop the EcoComplex at the Blackburn Landfill off Rocky Ford Road in Newton to share resources and operate off green energy.

A steam plant is the next planned addition.

The EcoComplex consists of businesses and research facilities that use each other's byproducts. The companies also use electricity created by burning methane that's produced by the landfill.

"The EcoComplex is a developing center for green energy, and agricultural and environmental innovation," Director of Catawba County Utilities and Engineering Barry Edwards said. "We are creating a centralized location for research on all aspects of natural energy recovery and utilization, as well as research of alternative fuels and minimization of greenhouse gases for environmental, agricultural and energy use."

Gregory Wood Products and PalletOne and the Catawba County-owned Blackburn Landfill comprise of what is known as the EcoComplex.

The future steam plant will be fueled by sawdust from Gregory Wood Products and PalletOne. The plant will then produce the needed heat for the companies and the county's operations.

Together, the partners decided it was best to share one heat source rather than each build their own, because it creates less waste, Steve Randall, General Manager of Gregory Wood Products said.

The steam would be used by the county to treat its waste at the Blackburn Wastewater Treatment Plant; Gregory Wood Products would use it to dry its wood slabs in a kiln and PalletOne would also use the heat to finish its own wood slabs.

Gregory Wood Products runs a sawmill creates planked wood, wood chips, bark chips and sawdust. The cut wood is sliced into boards and cubed rails, which are sold to businesses for construction.

"This is very out of the ordinary," Randall said. "It's something no other lumber mills are doing."

He said most lumber companies build their own drying kiln and use only about one-fourth of the heat while the other three-fourths are wasted. The shared steam plant will eliminate the need to transport the wood planks to its drying kiln at G&G Lumber in Union Grove 52 miles away.

"You waste a lot of energy like that," Randall said.

Any unused energy can be sold to Duke Energy. The County is already selling excess energy produced by the landfill to Duke Energy.

The company processes about 50 truck loads of lumber each day which amounts to 2,000 logs of various sizes.

Randall has been involved since the project started about five years ago.

Gregory Wood Products was the first business to move to the site in late 2004. Randall said the company began its lumber manufacturing process in January of 2006 after 18 months of construction. They also sell 10 percent of their logs to PalletOne.

The Target Distribution Center will be joining the EcoComplex when its new facility is completed next year, Edwards said.

On Monday, Catawba County held a community meeting at Jacob's Fork Middle School where residents were given the opportunity to ask questions about county projects like the EcoComplex and Bakers Mountain Park, among others.